DARK
HORSE
MANGA
BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
107
$2.99 US
SHORTCUT
1 OF 5
HIROAKI SAMURA
BLADE
OF THE IMMORTAL
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by **DANA LEWIS**
lettering and retouch by **TOMOKO SAITO**
cover colors by **DAN JACKSON**

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI
Immortal *rōnin*, vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge

RIN
Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryū dōjō* destroyed by the Ittō *ryū*, seeks Anotsu's death

ANOTSU
The leader of the Ittō-*ryū* sword school, targeted by the Mugai-*ryū*

HABAKI KAGIMURA
Powerful manipulative Mugai-*ryū* leader and *bangashira* serving the Shogun

HYAKURIN
Mugai-*ryū* assassin recovering from torture at the hands of Ittō-*ryū* renegades

GIICHI
Mugai-*ryū* assassin reeling from the death of his son

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Habaki Kagimura orchestrates a surprise attack at a lavish banquet that decimates a batch of new Ittō *ryū* recruits. With ten core followers still alive, Anotsu rallies his surviving warriors together to dish out vengeance and rededicate themselves to his ideals. After sparring with Giichi, Manji agrees to meet with the mysterious Kagimura at a *bakufu* stronghold near Edo Castle, where Manji is ambushed, overwhelmed, and captured.

designer **DEBRA BAILEY** editor **PHILIP SIMON** publisher **MIKE RICHARDSON**

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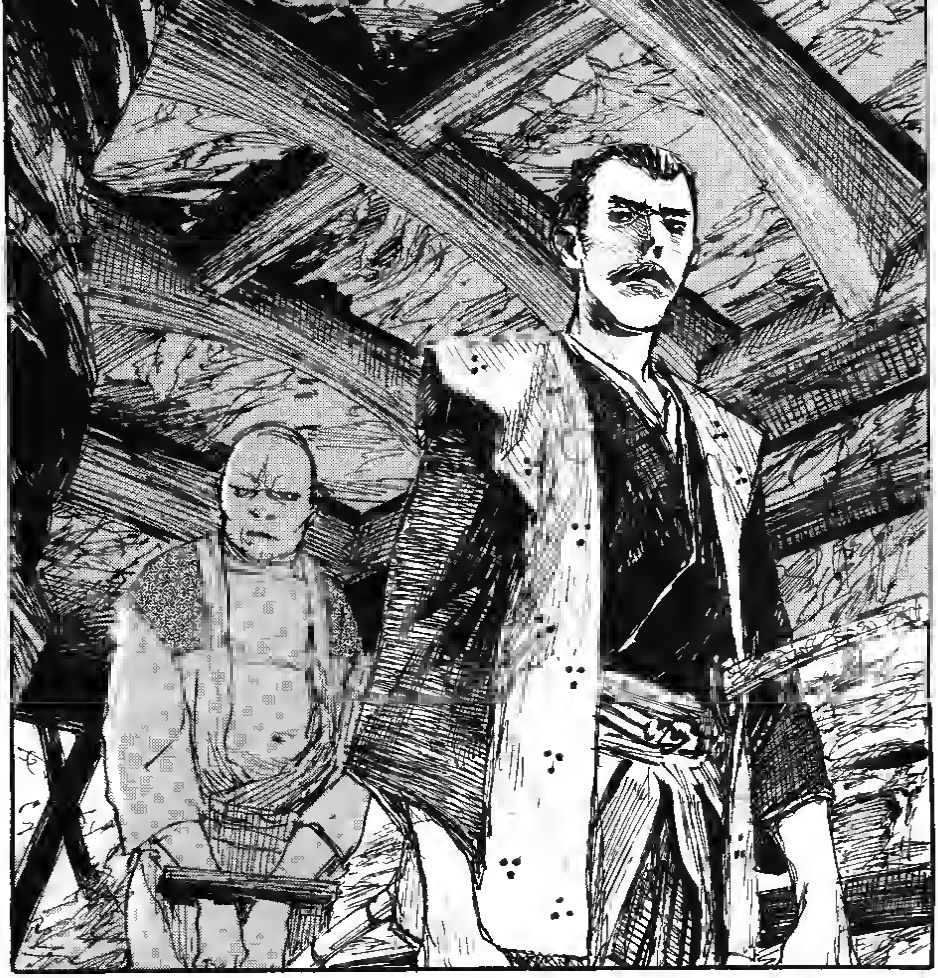
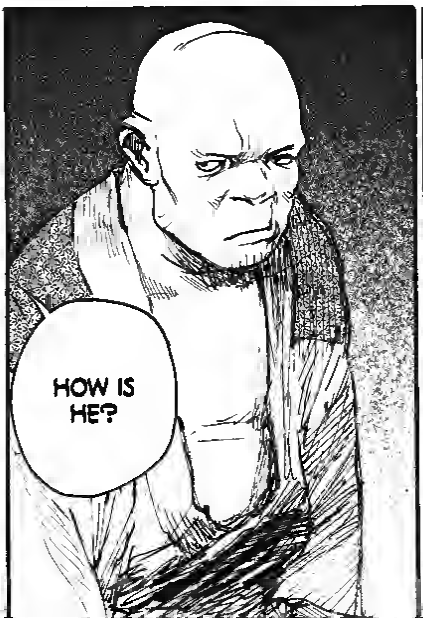
無限の住人

SHORTCUT
-part one-

AHH?!
YOU FUCKER...
I BROUGHT YOU A BODY.




HOW IS HE?

HE SHOULD DO.

HABAKI
KAGI-
MURRRAHHH
!!
HARR
NNGH!
SHANG
SHANG
GRAAH
HH!
YOU
BASTARD!
I'M
GONNA--!
BARBARIAN.
ALLOW
ME TO
CLARIFY,
HABAKI-
DONO.

WE ARE TO CONFIRM HIS CONDITION...
...AND IMPART TO THIS OTHER MAN...
IN SHORT...
...THE IDENTICAL RESTORATIVE ABILITIES.

...RENDERING HIM *IMMORTAL.*
I PRESUME I'VE LEFT NOTHING OUT?
HRM.

I'LL ADD ONE DETAIL.
SHOULD YOU SUCCEED AND ESTABLISH THE TECHNIQUE WITHOUT DELAY...
...IT IS OBVIOUSLY NOT *THIS* MAN ALONE WE WISH TO MAKE IMMORTAL.
WE NEED AN UTTERLY RELIABLE *PROCESS*. ANYTHING ELSE, NO MATTER HOW MIRACULOUS, IS WORTH NOTHING.
.....
.....
.....
IMMORTAL? THESE GUYS ARE *NUTS*.
DO YOU INTEND... TO GIVE YOUR TROOPS *IMMORTAL BODIES* IN READINESS FOR WAR?
BURANDO!
HAH?! MY *LORD!* FORGIVE ME!

HMM...
AN INTRIGUING NOTION...
WHAT WOULD WE DO IF WE CREATED SUCH DANGEROUS WARRIORS...AND THEY TURNED AGAINST US?
...BUT THINK, BURANDO.
ALL WILL COME CLEAR IN TIME. FOR NOW, TRIAL AND ERROR.
MY LORD.
AND SO, HABAKI-DONO.
HOW MUCH TIME ARE WE ALLOWED TO PRODUCE OUR RESULTS, YEA OR NAY?
MŌZEN.
YOU HAVE EIGHT DAYS.
JUST... JUST EIGHT DAYS?!
IF YOU FAIL, BURANDO TAKES OVER.

FURTHER-MORE, BURANDO, IF YOU FAIL IN EIGHT DAYS...
...DON'T ASSUME EITHER OF YOU WILL LEAVE THESE CASTLE GATES.
UNDER-STOOD.
I SHALL TAKE THESE EIGHT DAYS AS A DICTATE FROM HEAVEN... BY HOOK OR BY CROOK, I SHALL REVEAL HIS SECRET FOR YOU, LORD!
WELL SAID. I COUNT ON IT.
JUST ONE MINUTE, HERE!

HABAKI-DONO! I MUST SPEAK!
FOR US TO MAKE A MAN IMMORTAL, WE'RE VIOLATING THE VERY RULES OF NATURE!
AND TO BE COMMANDED THUS IN JUST EIGHT DAYS--?
WE KNOW FAR TOO LITTLE ABOUT THIS MAN.
IF WE ARE TO TAKE ON SO HUGE A TASK IN SUCH HASTE, WE MAY BE FORCED TO OVERBURDEN BOTH OF THEIR BODIES.
HOW MUCH OF THAT CAN THIS MAN'S IMMORTALITY WITHSTAND? AND EVEN MORE IMPORTANT...
...IS THIS... THIS "IMMORTALITY"... EVEN REAL?!
BURANDO!!

YOU DON'T TRUST MY WORD?
FOR SEVEN YEARS, I LIVED HAND TO MOUTH, JOURNEYING THROUGH KARA AND THE NANBAN LANDS.
IF I SPEAK SO BRAZENLY TO THE ONE WHO SAVED ME... WHO FREED ME FROM THE PRISON DEATH THAT AWAITED ME FOR HAVING SO DEFIED THE SHOGUNATE'S WILL...
...IT IS BECAUSE, ON MY JOURNEYS, I VISITED MANY A MAN WHOSE IMMORTALITY-- WHOSE INFINITE LIFE--WAS WHISPERED ABOUT AS IF THEY WERE SAINTS.
AND EVERY ONE WAS A FRAUD!
THIS MAN WAS TESTED IN MY RESIDENCE.
BUT IF WE DON'T SEE IT, IT'S MEANING-LESS!!

...FAIR ENOUGH.
TORA-EMON!
CUT HIS FLESH. ANY-WHERE.
HAH?! SIR...?
TALKING PRETTY DAMN BIG...
...NOW THAT YOU GOT ME HANGING HIGH!

.....
.....
.....
HRGG...
SHARK!

BURANDO!
LOOK!

.....
.....
THE DEVIL...
HOHH...
HSSS!
FOOL!
A SCRATCH LIKE THAT? ON THE BATTLEFIELD EVEN I CAN HEAL QUICKLY...
...BY WILL ALONE!

BURAN-
DO.

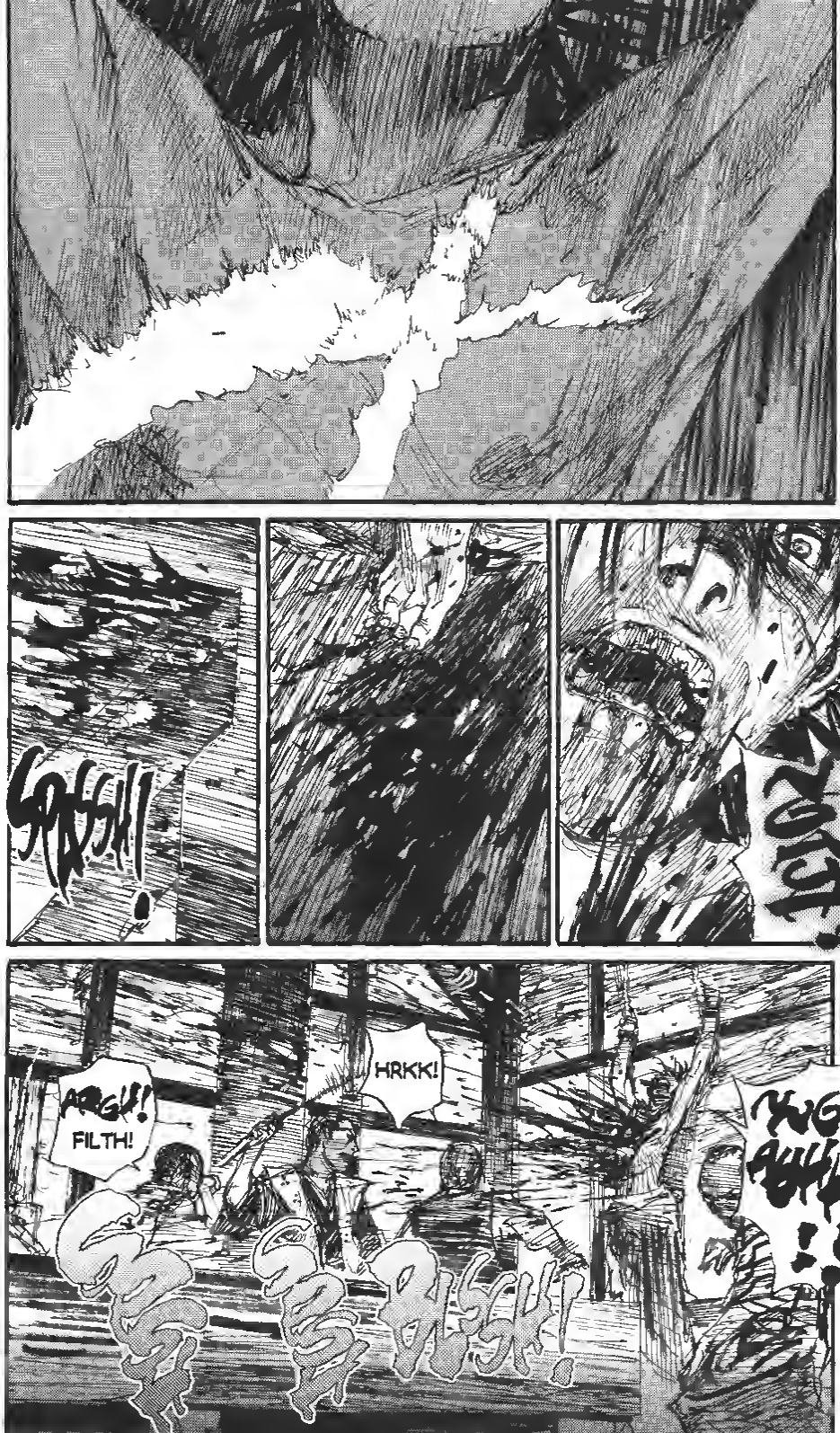
YOU
WEREN'T
SQUAWK-
ING...
...JUST
TO SEE
SOME-
THING
LIKE
THAT,
HMN?

NO,
SIR...
I MEAN,
YES,
UH...

HABAKI...

BEHOLD!
WHAT
SETS THIS
MAN--
--APART
FROM
US!

刺!!ボ!!

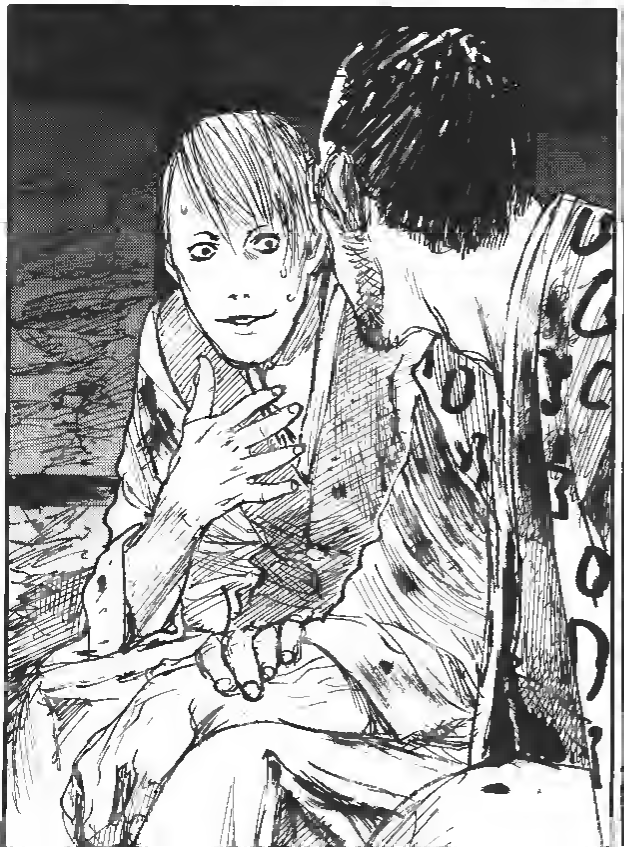

SPASH!
ZOOT!
ARGH! FILTH!
HRKK!
SPLASH!
YUGG AHHH!!

.....
.....
YECHH!
LET ME-- GOOD GOD!
NO! THAT'S... THAT'S INSANE!
YOU TAKE IT FROM HERE.

TORA-
EMON.

BRING
MY
MEDICINE
CAS--

GO OUT.
GET
A TUB OF
WATER
BOILING.
AND...

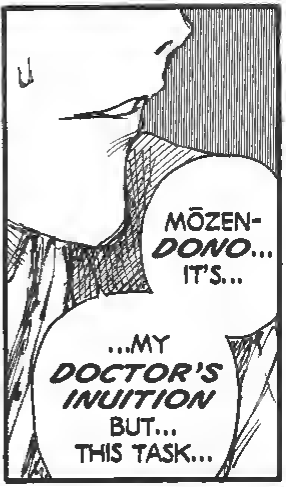


:haaf:...
:haaffh:...

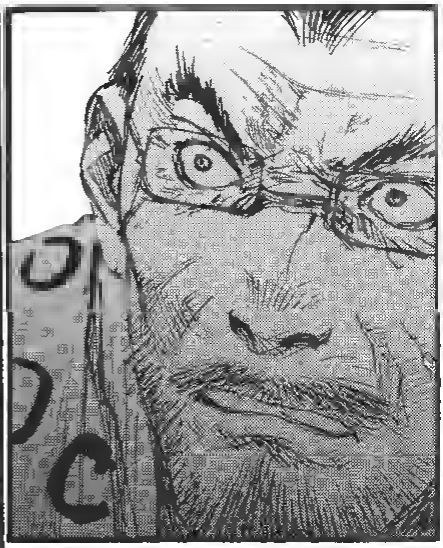
ME... ME...
LET ME DO IT!
LET ME AT HIM FIRST! MŌZEN-DONO!

.....
.....
.....

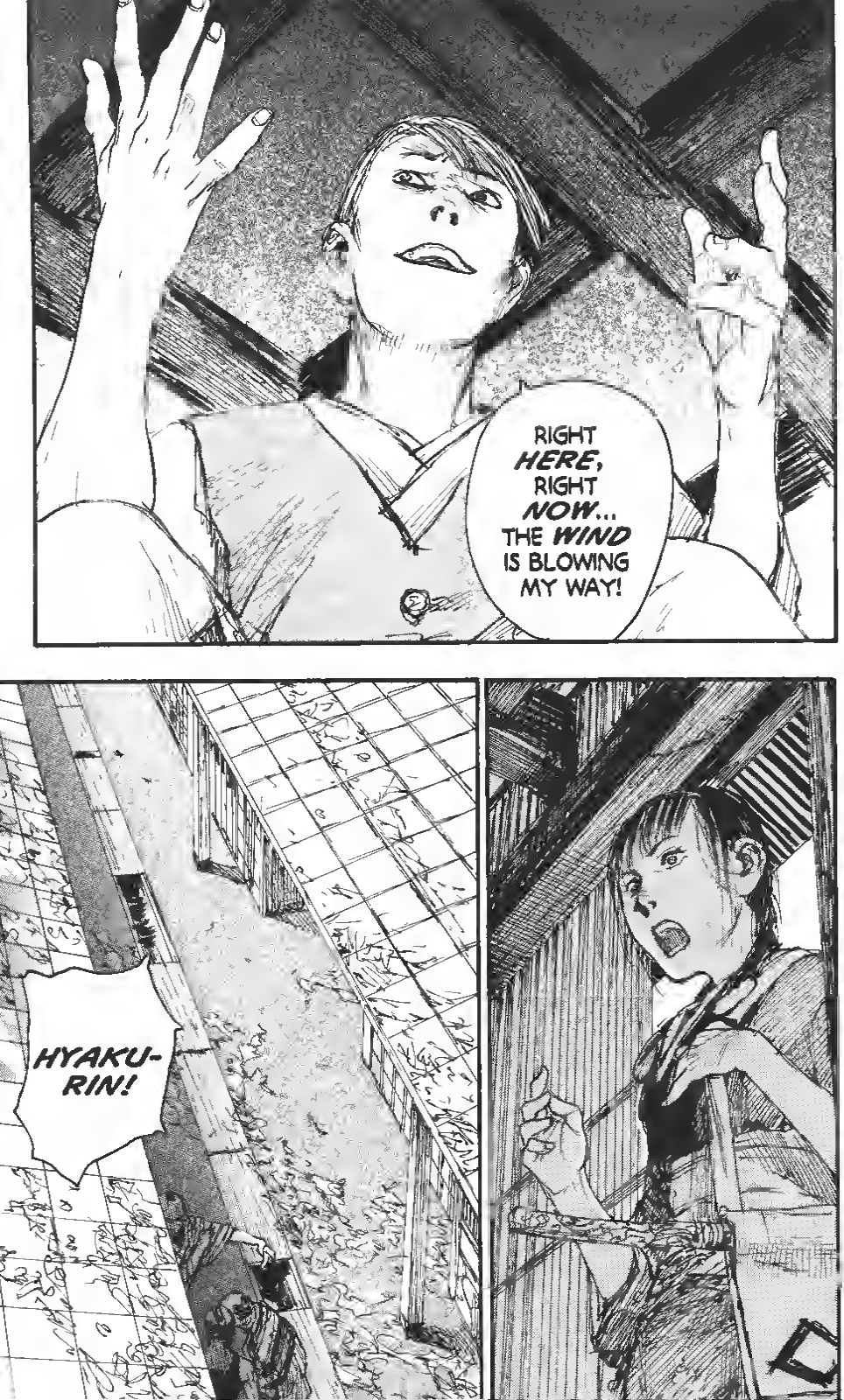
BURANDO, WASN'T IT YOU...
...WHO WAS SAYING "ELDERS FIRST"...?


MŌZEN-DONO... IT'S...
...MY DOCTOR'S INUITION BUT... THIS TASK...

...IT'S TOO BIG FOR YOU.



BURANDO! AT HABAKI-DONO'S COMMAND, THIS CHARGE IS MINE FOR EIGHT DAYS.
IN OTHER WORDS...
...THERE'S NO PLACE FOR YOU HERE!
GET OUT!!
MŌZEN, CAN'T YOU FEEL IT?


RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW... THE WIND IS BLOWING MY WAY!
HYAKU-RIN!

WHOA
WHOA
WHOA!
NO NO
NO!
YOU CAN'T COME INTO A DIVE LIKE THIS, YOU IDIOT CHILD!

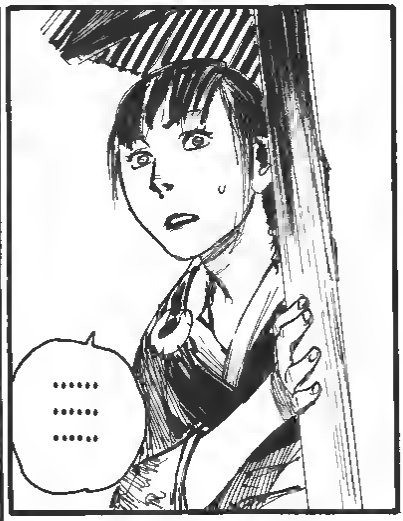
MANJI IS...?
I MEAN, YOU KNOW? WE'RE TALKING MANJI HERE.
BUT COME ON. REALLY.
I... I WANT TO THINK SO, TOO, BUT... IT'S BEEN TWO NIGHTS! WITHOUT A WORD! THE FIRST TIME EVER!
AND SINCE YESTERDAY, MY HEART'S BEEN... RACING.
LIKE, MAYBE, THIS VERY MINUTE...
...SOMETHING TERRIBLE'S HAPPENING TO HIM. SOMEWHERE HE'S BLEEDING, AND WE'RE JUST SITTING HERE!
I GET IT. I'M SORRY, KID.
GUESS YOU WON'T BELIEVE ME, BUT THE DAY I SAW YOU?
NO ONE PUT ME UP TO IT. HONEST.

I'M NOT DOUBTING YOU.
BUT I *DO* WANT YOUR *HELP*.
JUST ONE THING.
YOU MUST UNDER-STAND...
...EVEN IF WE GO TO HABAKI'S PLACE RIGHT NOW, AND I *GRILL* THEM...
...THEY'RE NOT GOING TO *BLAB OUT* EVERYTHING. YOU GOTTA ACCEPT THAT.
GIICHI COULD PROBABLY WORM OUT MORE.
THANK YOU. I'D LIKE TO TRY NOW ANYWAY.
JUST THE SAD REALITY. *POWER*, AND ALL THAT...

MANJI. YOU SAY?
AS I TOLD THE YOUNG MISS... YOU CAN'T EXPECT ME TO KNOW THE WHEREABOUTS OF SOME GUEST WHO LEFT US LONG AGO. NO IDEA. NOT A CLUE.
TRULY, THE HEIGHT OF FOOLISH-NESS...
ABSO-LUTELY. I COULDN'T AGREE MORE.
THERE'S NO POINT IN THROWING PRECIOUS TIME DOWN THE DRAIN WITH YOU!
NOW LET ME IN! OR CALL YOUR BOSS! THAT'S ALL IT TAKES!

THE MASTER IS AT THE CASTLE. HE SHAN'T RETURN UNTIL NIGHTFALL.
OH. *REALLY?*
I'LL BE BACK *TONIGHT*, THEN!
HE SHAN'T RETURN, YES, BUT...
...HE *DID* GIVE ME A LETTER, TO READ TO MADAM SHOULD SHE COME TO CALL.
LET'S SEE...
"*MUGAI-RYŪ* DEPUTY CHAIR, GIICHI, AND VICE-DEPUTY CHAIR, HYAKURIN.
"THE TWO AFORE-NAMED..."

"...EFFECTIVE THE DATE OF THE READING OF THIS ANNOUNCEMENT, ARE DISMISSED FROM THEIR DUTIES.
"FURTHERMORE, EFFECTIVE THIS SAME DATE, THE MUGAI-RYŪ IS DISSOLVED IN PERPETUITY.
FORMER HEAD CHAIR, HABAKI KAGIMURA."



TO BE CONTINUED...!

NEXT MONTH:
SHORTCUT, Part 2 of 5

Hidden in a fortified prison cell near Edo Castle, Manji endures rough inspections at the hands of Habaki Kagimura's medical examiners. Oddly enough, despite being imprisoned and tortured, Manji finds some comfort and friendship in a conversation with his cellmate—a simple man with a sad story. Politics, horror and squabbling, demented surgeons! Hiroaki Samura is pulling our favorite immortal warrior down a very disturbing, bloody pathway... and the twisted fun in this "Shortcut" story arc is just getting started!

Send letters and fan art to
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All fan artwork, letters, and e-mails submitted become the property of Dark Horse Comics.

GLOSSARY

Bakufu: The central government and bureaucracy that grew up around the Tokugawa Shogunate. Originally established in Edo by the warlord Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Bangashira: Head of the *banshu*.

Banshū: Officers serving under the Shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the Shogun himself.

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts; here, a training center for swordsmanship.

Ittō-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Kara: Archaic term for China, referring to the Tang Dynasty.

Kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Kessen-satsu: "Bloodworm killer." A poison used to counteract the *kessen-chu*.

Mugai-ryū: Criminals working as assassins for the Shogunate, earning their freedom by killing assigned targets, literally, "without form."

Mutenichi-ryū: The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Nanban: Southern barbarians. Westerners were called this because their ships first reached Japan from the South and their manners were considered quite rude.

Ryū: A sword school.

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

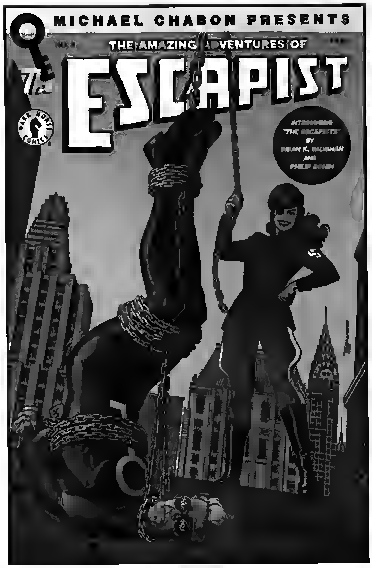
The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su* — "well" + *asti* — "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction, and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for right, and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

HORSEPOWER



Michael Chabon is easily my favorite living novelist, so imagine my shock when I came home to a message on my machine from him, which said, "Brian, the League of the Golden Key needs you."

One conversation later, and I had signed up with Dark Horse to be the writer of an all-new ongoing story that will begin appearing as of this month in each installment of the quarterly *Amazing Adventures of the Escapist* (which will continue to feature anthology-style tales from today's best writers and artists in the back of every issue).

As a former magician who used to perform his own (half-assed) straitjacket routine, I love the Escapist, but my favorite chapters from *Kavalier & Clay* weren't about the costumed hero, they were about his creators. So, taking a page from Chabon's novel, the serialized story I'm telling with extraordinary talents Philip Bond, Steve Rolston, and Jason Alexander will balance the fictional adventures of the Escapist with the "real world" drama of the all-new creators behind the comic-book character's modern day return.

And because the Escapist's original author has already written about New York City more vibrantly than I could ever hope to, I decided to set our young protagonists' story in my hometown of Cleveland, a city that's produced comics luminaries from Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster to mainstream superstar Brian Michael Bendis to indie sensation Harvey Pekar (with whom I'm honored to share my first issue).

While I hope that longtime fans of the Escapist will feel that our series is a worthy continuation of the Champion of Liberation's legend, I also set out to write a comic that would be absolutely accessible to readers who have yet to visit Empire City. So if you've been looking for an excuse to check out the Escapist and his Harvey and Eisner Award-winning series, why not give this new issue a shot?

Come on, what are you waiting for, kid? The League of the Golden Key needs you!

Brian K. Vaughan
The Keyhole
October 2005

WHY THE HELL WOULD A NEXT GUY BUY THE PUBLISHING RIGHTS TO A SIXTY YEAR-OLD COMIC BOOK THAT MOST PEOPLE HAVE NEVER EVEN HEARD OF?
BECAUSE KAVALIER & CLAY WERE TWO OF THE GREATEST CREATORS IN THE HISTORY OF THE MEDIUM. THEIR CHARACTER IS AN ICON.
WITH MY WORDS AND YOUR PICTURES WE COULD INTRODUCE A WHOLE NEW GENERATION TO THE ESCAPIST

Case Weaver and Max Roth, the latter day Kavalier & Clay, from "The Escapists," premiering in *The Amazing Adventures of the Escapist* #8, on sale November 2005

FROM MICHAEL CHABON'S WEBSITE:

Not yet thirty, Mr. Vaughan is the best young writer in mainstream comics, the heir apparent to Alan Moore, Grant Morrison, and Neil Gaiman. Skeptics and doubters are referred immediately to his work on *Y: The Last Man*, *Runaways*, *Ex Machina*, and *The Hood*.

In spite of his already heavy workload, Mr. Vaughan agreed to take on [this] job.

After bringing to bear on the problem his formidable knowledge of the world of comics, from the mists of the Golden Age to the Xeroxed and stapled world of the self-pubilshed zine, his sensitive grasp of character, his muscular story-telling gift, his fine ear for dialog, and a careful re-reading of the source novel, he turned in a script that caused grown men, or at least one grown man, to weep for joy.

It is a script that well meets, and perhaps even exceeds, the expectations raised by the shadow of the parent novel: the need for a sense of immersion in a "real" world of "real" characters. It is absolutely faithful both to the spirit of Joe Kavalier and Sam Clay and Rosa Saks, and to that of the Escapist himself. And yet it is, thrillingly, unmistakably the work of Mr. Vaughan.

— Michael Chabon
author, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*

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NOVEMBER 2005

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I Am

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